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CONSPIRATOR IN BUTTE COUNTY IDENTIFICATION THEFT RING
PLEADS GUILTY TO BANK FRAUD, POSSESSION OF STOLEN
U.S. MAIL AND CONSPIRACY

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that HEATHER MICHELLE WILSON, 34, of Chico, California, pled guilty yesterday to federal conspiracy, possession of stolen United States mail, and bank fraud charges before United States District Judge Frank C. Damrell Jr.

This case is the product of a combined investigation by the Butte County Sheriff's Department, Chico Police Department, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and other law enforcement agencies in Northern California, specifically including state and local authorities in Glenn, Tehama, and Plumas Counties.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Rodriguez, who is prosecuting the case, WILSON pled guilty to conspiring with co-defendants JODI LYNN GARCIA, 31, of Paradise, California, TIFFANY ANN SABRAL, 27, of Chico, California, and TANYA LESLIE WELLMAN, 37, of Durham, California. On August 8, 2007, the defendants were charged in a 32 count federal indictment. The conspiracy alleges that the defendants executed a scheme to manufacture checks with account numbers of others and to negotiate the checks at federally insured financial institutions, as well as at casinos and merchants in Northern California. The defendants used stolen identification and account number information from the United States mail and elsewhere to create the fraudulent checks. According to court documents, the conspirators stole between \$30,000 and \$70,000 from victim banks and financial institutions. From November 2006 through July 2007, there were more than 50 different victims targeted by the conspirators.

WILSON pled guilty to five counts of bank fraud, a single count of possession of stolen United States mail, and a single count of conspiracy. SABRAL pled guilty on August 27, 2007, to two counts of bank fraud and a single count of conspiracy and WELLMAN pled guilty on September 14, 2007 to four counts of bank fraud and a single count of conspiracy.

On September 6, 2007, in a related case before Judge Damrell, JODI LYNN GARCIA was charged with conspiracy, stolen mail possession, aggravated identification theft, and bank fraud offenses and MELISSA ANN MEIER, 19, of Chico, California was charged with conspiracy, aggravated identification theft, bank fraud, and possession of stolen United States mail. GARCIA is scheduled for a status hearing in federal district court before Judge Damrell on October 1, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. and MEIER is scheduled for a status hearing in federal district court before Judge Damrell on October 15, 2007 at 10:00 a.m.

WILSON's sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 14, 2008, WELLMAN's sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 28, 2008 and SABRAL's sentencing hearing is scheduled for November 5, 2007. All sentencing hearings will be before Judge Damrell.

WILSON, WELLMAN, and SABRAL each faces up to 30 years imprisonment for bank fraud and up to five years imprisonment for participation in the conspiracy and for possession of stolen United States mail. However, the actual sentence will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables, and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The charges against GARCIA and MEIER are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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